

REWRITING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The Andrew Browning
Lectures 1989

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The French Revolution is often times viewed as the catalyst for the end of European feudalism. Unlike the British and American Revolutions, the French Revolution witnessed a large social upheaval that took decades of warfare and social changes to bring about. The study of the conflicts between the French nobility, elite classes (to include the bourgeois) and the sans-culottes provide a fascinating examination of the eventual collapse of feudalism in and the transition towards capitalism. The French Revolution was a period of far-reaching social and political upheaval in France and its colonies beginning in 1789 and ending in 1799. The Revolution overthrew the monarchy, established a republic, catalyzed violent periods of political turmoil, and finally culminated in a dictatorship under Napoleon who brought many of its principles to areas he conquered in Western Europe and beyond. Inspired by liberal and radical ideas, as equality before the law the Revolution made a profound French Revolution, revolutionary movement that shook France between 1787 and 1799 and reached its first climax there in 1789—hence the conventional term “Revolution of 1789,” denoting the end of the ancien regime in France and serving also to distinguish that event from the later French revolutions of 1830 and 1848. The French Revolution was a period of major social upheaval that began in 1787 and ended in 1799. It sought to completely change the relationship between the rulers and those they governed and to redefine the nature of political power. It proceeded in a back-and-forth process between revolutionary and reactionary forces. Why did the French Revolution happen?